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THE SETTING OF ST. PAUL'S APOLOGY.

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Athens, Greece.

Everything about Athens, about Greece indeed so far as I have seen it, seems almost a special creation for its historical purpose. One feels this in the Theatre, on the Pnyx, on the Acropolis—a persistent reminder of the exquisite taste of the old Greek in making Nature the vehicle of Art, in forever doing the right thing æsthetically in the right place. I felt this with especial keenness the other day as I stood again on “Sunium’s marbled steep” and considered the simple exquisite perfection of its temple set in an environment of mountain and sea fit to transform a clod into a poet and worshipper.

And here on the Areopagus, the only query is whether the Jew of Tarsus had the Greek felicity to choose this platform or the Greeks of that day still inherited the felicity to thrust it on him. For with my Greek Testament, my Pausanias and Dr. Dörpfeld * to assist in the formation of a judgment, I am constrained to declare that not even Demosthenes on yonder Bema had a fitter environment for his Philippics than had Paul for his Christian Apology on this Rock of Ares.

Physically, the Areopagus is at first a disappointment—to me it was the one disappointing thing in old Athens. An elongated hog’s back—as the animal squats on its hams—is not a noble figure ;† and between the commanding Acropolis on the one hand and the sightly range of the Nymphs, Pnyx and Museum Hills on the other, it is a dwarf indeed. But the first impression is transient only ; seen day after day, as I

* This accomplished archæologist has done much to correct, even radically, the map of Ancient Athens and his results are now accessible to English readers in Miss Harrison’s “Mythology and Monuments.” Many of these corrections are tacitly accepted in the present study.

† I find that Dean Stanley had made a more poetic, and possibly a more just comparison, viz., to “a scaly crawling monster, advancing toward the citadel.”

have seen it now for a year and more, and regarded for what it really is—a colossal rock rather than a dwarfish hill—it becomes one of the thoroughly satisfying features of the Athenian landscape. But it is in its relations to all the rest—to the totality of old Athenian environment—that one finds its final and enduring attraction. And it is this totality of impression which I hope at least dimly to convey to many whose own senses can never directly receive it on the spot.

Legend and history had glorified the old Rock long before the apostle came to light the new beacon on it. Its juridical associations carry us back to the days of simple faith and very imperfect gods. Round yonder by the temple of Asklepios whose holy well still flows, medicinal of fleshly ills Poseidon's son Halirrhotos had wantoned with the war-god's daughter and Ares slew him. Hence the first inquest for blood, I think, and certainly the first jury trial of which Greek mythology makes record: here on this Rock by a jury of his peers—The Twelve Gods—Ares was duly brought to bar and purged of guilt,—the verdict being, no doubt, one of justifiable homicide. Hence Areopagus, the Rock of Ares;* and Mars Hill is an unhappy misnomer that ought to be forever put under ban. The Roman god has no sort of business here and, what is more serious, this is not a hill and the old Greeks had too fine an instinct ever to name it one.

Then, somewhere in the abyss and void of time before chronology began, came on that other *cause célèbre*—the vindication of Orestes. Living within a few hours (by rail) of Agamemnon's capital and having in daily view the golden treasure from its tombs—much of it as fresh and fine to-day as anything a Parisian goldsmith could fashion—one should not find it so very hard to think Orestes back to this judgment seat with the Erinyes shaking their snaky tresses in his face.

Here stands Apollo gloriously fair to plead for the defendant, what a brief he holds! The son slayer of the mother in retribution for the father she had slain: conflict of duties fit

* The writer is aware of the difficulties of etymology and astrology, but for his purpose the traditional view is the pertinent one. St. Paul had never thought of Areopagus as the Hill of the Aræ, *curses* i. e. Erinyes.

to consecrate a crime. The higher law is vindicated by Athena's casting vote and the holy criminal is spoken free. And here in that primal revelation of Mercy tempering justice behold those grisly Furies transformed into gracious Eumenides and given this rocky grot almost beneath our feet to be their shrine and dwelling-place; while Athena's voice is heard proclaiming:

"This council I establish pure from bribe,
Reverend and keen to act for those that sleep,
An ever-watchful sentry of the land."

What wonder this Rock became the fountain-head of Hellenic justice through all the glorious ages and that in the letter it is so to-day: the Supreme Court of Greece is still the Court of Areopagus,* whose last Chief Justice we buried only a few weeks ago with well-nigh princely pomp.

Rock of Ares it may have been at first because the war-god was justiced here; but it was to further justify its name as a theatre of Ares in his more proper character. Here the Amazons, his daughters laying siege to Athens sacrificed to him; and posted here the Persians shot their burning shafts at the wooden wall of the Acropolis till they found a better way to its conquest up through the grotto of Agralos. Of the battles, sieges, catastrophes it has witnessed from that day to this under Roman, Goth, Venetian, Frank, Turk, we need not here read the roll. Rock of Ares it is by good right, however etymologists may demur. And the war-god's sanctuary at its Western foot was no less fitly placed than were the Eumenides installed in the gloomy grotto under its Eastern brow to lend their awful sanction to the court above.

On this Rock then let us open the New Testament and study the setting of that Christian apology—a sermon arrested in its exordium, yet reaching farther into the heart of things than poet or philosopher or hierophant of Greece had ever probed.

I do not know, and it does not concern us now to speculate, how the Apostle came up. It is usual to say by the steps hewn in the living rock near the Southeast corner, which was

* It startles one at first to read in the Greek newspapers a story of Stanley Mathews as President (?) of the American *Areopagus* or the grave announcement that Mrs. Stanton aspires to be made an *Areopagite* in place of the lamented Areopagite Miller.

indeed the state approach as it continues to-day. But there is an easier way and one that gives a juster impression of the Rock itself, while unfolding gradually the glorious panorama which it has to offer. If Paul came up this way, as I have just done, the sermon may well have been conceived and elaborated on the spot. Passing the so-called *Theseion*, still intact, and how many splendid things that are no more, he would have come round to the West end of Areopagus and passed up the easy slope to the summit. At every step he would pass altars, statues, sacred structures whose foundations carved and hewn in the living rock still bear witness that this spot was once populous with gods. And at every step the unfolding panorama would buoy up his thought from gods to God; how the mountains rise and swell upon the vision—the great sweep of Aegaleos and Parnes, the sharp summit of Lycabettus with the white quarries of Pentelicus shining out behind to light the way to Marathon, and lovely-tinted Hymettus running down to the Aegean. Another rise and the mountains beyond the mountains loom blue against the azure sky: Cithæron, and Geraneia, and the Argive heights, while the long stretch of Peloponnesian coast defines itself behind rock-ribbed Salamis and Aegina. And the sea: how it smiles and shimmers under this tender overbrooding sky. Truly, if Paul's eyes beheld such a vision of the Great Artist's handiwork as one beholds from this spot to-day, 'tis no wonder that "temples made with hands" seemed too paltry for His dwelling-place and the ministry of such hands impertinent.

And it is not the distant prospect only that unrolls in the ascent. Athens in her *deisidaimonia*, in her historic pride, in her Hellenic glory, reveals herself feature by feature. Woe to the orator who passes with shut eyes through his audience to his platform,—more woe to him who attempts to address an unknown people in an unknown land. Paul did neither. Whatever he may have learned at the feet of Gamaliel, we know that Tarsus in his time was a great Hellenic university outvying even Athens and Alexandria in philosophy and encyclopedic culture.* Bred in such an atmosphere, lisping Greek from his infancy, searching the scriptures of his own

* Strabo xiv. 5. 13.

people in that tongue divine,* Hebrew of the Hebrews though he was, Paul did not reach this pulpit "in the midst of Mars Hill" without knowing Greece, without a profound insight into the Greek mind. The story of Greece, the thought of Greece, the art of Greece, the religion of Greece faced him all the way. Behind him to the left he saw the olive groves stretching away for miles through the Attic Plain, and embowered in them the Academy where Plato had taught, and fair Colonus, scene of Sophocles' birth and the passing of Oedipus. To his right rose the Pnyx with all its traditions of glorious democracy, and over it Salamis. Shut in on three sides by Pnyx, Areopagus, and Acropolis lay the Agora of Athenian politics; while at his feet on the Northeast spread out the market-place with its busy chattering throngs. Skirting this on the West and following all the Northern foot of the Rock on which he stood, ran a sinuous line of sacred monuments, some of which we still see. But St. Paul saw them not as we see them to-day, monuments of well-nigh forgotten meaning. Athens was still a Greek city instinct with Hellenic life.

From Pausanias who came a century later we can fill in the view as Paul beheld it. Out beyond the Ceramicus gleam the fair temples of Colonus; the groves of the Academy; and the Sacred Way, a shining thread strung with shrines and monuments as far as the eye can travel until it is lost in the mystic gap of Aegaleos. It is the way of the Great Mysteries, trodden how oft by the spiritual *elite* of Athens as they went up in solemn torch-lit pomp to the great Communion at Eleusis—a communion in which, if ever, Paul might think of them as "seeking God if haply they might feel after him and find him." Traveling back over this shining way, his eyes would rest upon the great double gate of Athens, the Dipylon a fortress in itself, from which the sacred processions set forth—the Mystic outward to Eleusis, the Panathenaic inward bearing the sacred peplos to Athena on the Acropolis. True, more than a hundred years before Sulla had wrought sad havoc here probably burying under his huge *agger* the monuments of the outer Ceramicus some of which are just uncovering now; but the Dipylon was no doubt still the en-

* His Old Testament quotations are all from the Septuagint.

trance of the city to Pausanias as it may well have been to Paul. Any way it was from that entrance his eye would follow the long stretch of *sebasmata* from the city wall to the Rock on which he stood.

Alongside the gate rose the Pompeion or depôt of the sacred processions, and near by a temple of Demeter with images of the goddess herself, her daughter, and Iacchos holding a torch—all from the chisel of Praxiteles. So that the Mystics set forth from a sanctuary of the Great Goddess at Athens to proceed to her Holy of Holies at Eleusis. Not far from this temple stood an equestrian statue of Poseidon hurling his spear at the giant Polybotes. Just inside the Dipylon still stands a round marble altar with its top broken off but its inscription yet nearly intact—dedicating it to Zeus as god of the Walled City along with Hermes of the Gate and Akamas eponymus of the tribe to which this Ceramicus belonged. This altar was at least four centuries old when Paul beheld it—the very first Athenian altar on which his eyes could have rested if he came in by this gate. Extending inward from the Dipylon runs the great Dromos or street of the Panathenaic processions—a Sacred Way within the town. Using Pausanias' eyes in part to see what Paul must have seen with his own, this is what appears: colonnades leading from the gate to the inner Ceramicus, faced by statues in bronze of famous men and women. In one of these colonnades statues of gods and a gymnasium of Hermes, as well as the house of Poulytion, wherein Alcibiades and his lewd fellows had mocked the mysteries, but now dedicated to Dionysos Melpomenos: and here statues of Athena Paionia and Zeus and Mnemosyne and the Muses, an Apollo of Eubulides and Akratos of the Dionysiac route.* Next rises the Royal Portico: it was the palace of Democratic Athens, seat of the King Archon centering in himself all the priestly functions of the King, as the presidency of the Eleusinian Mysteries and direction of public sacrifice. Here the Court of Areopagus met for the hearing of certain secret cases, and it was here that the charge of impiety was brought against

* In the line of these colonnades now stand the Athens-Piræus railway station and the Prometheus Steam Mill.

Socrates, as we know from the Euthyphron; and outside stood the altar whereon the Archons swore to defend the laws and take no bribe. After the Areopagus itself the Royal Portico in full sight must have impressed a man called to account, however informally, as a setter forth of strange Gods.

Adjoining is the Stoa Eleutherios flanked by statues of Conon, Timotheos, Eragoras, Hadrian, Zeus Eleutherios—each in his way a deliverer of Athens—and containing paintings by Euphranor of the Twelve Gods; of Theseus, Demokratia and Demos; and of the Battle of Mantinea. And near by at the foot of the Market hill (*Kolonos Agoraios*) on the South a temple of Apollo Patroos, called Alexikakos “because by an oracle from Delphi he stayed the plague which distressed Attica during the Peloponnesian War.”

Just above these three structures on the Hill of the Agora stood the Temple of Hephaistos.* It must have been a thing of fresh and striking beauty to Paul's eyes for it was then scarcely six hundred years old and the eighteen centuries that have looked upon it since have passed and left it a thing of beauty still—the one almost perfect survival out of all the splendid temples of old Greece. Indeed far from marring, the ages have so mellowed its beauty that (as Wordsworth observed sixty years ago) “the Temple looks as if it had been quarried not from the bed of a rocky mountain but from the golden light of an Athenian sunset.”

Immediately under the Apostle's eyes to the Northeast appear the Metroon, the Bouleuterion, the Tholos, the Statues of the Eponymoi, the Hieron of Ares. The first was the sanctuary of the mother of the gods, with her image by Pheidias, and here under her guardianship the State archives were kept; in the second the Council of Five Hundred met and it was from the altar of Hestia therein that Theramenes was dragged to death by the minions of Kritias. The Tholos served the Prytanes as a mess-room, and it was hither the Thirty summoned Socrates in their vain desire to involve him in their ruthless crimes. Passing the statues of the ten heroes who gave name to the Attic tribes, the eye rests again

* Traditionally called the Theseion: Dr. Dörpfeld seems to be right in turning this tradition out of court.

on sacred images (among them Eirene holding baby Ploutos in her arms) and Athenian worthies in bronze—Lycurgus, and Kallias, and last Demosthenes whom the Athenians drove into exile at Calauria—and there he took poison and died. His statue must have faced the Bema, as over the Bema the Areopagus still looks upon unhappy Calauria. From the great orator we pass to the proper deity of the Rock. Here by its Western foot stands the sanctuary of Ares, with statues of the god himself, of Athena and Aphrodite. And around it other statues of Herakles, Theseus, and Apollo binding his hair with a fillet, and the poet Pindar whom Athens delighted to honor as he honored her; and further on Harmodios and Aristogeiton, the toast of Athenian democracy ever since

“The day that they struck the tyrant down
And made this Athens a freeman's town.”

Such, roughly sketched, is what the Apostle's eyes would behold as he glanced from the Dipylon gate to the point in the narrow pass between the Hill of Nymphs and the Areopagus, where his ascent may have begun. Turning now to the South in the valley of the political Agora* he had at his feet the Eleusinion, the sacred precinct of two temples—one of Demeter and Kore, the other of Triptolemos; of these we know too little because, as usual in all matters of the Mysteries, Pausanias on the very threshold of his account found himself prevented by a vision in a dream. To Paul it might well have supplied a pagan parable for the resurrection doctrine, had pagan patience granted him a longer hearing.

At last arrived “in the midst of Mars Hill,” straight before his face, crowning all the prospect and climax of all the glory of Athens, rises that other Rock—the “stately Acropolis itself, faced with its Propylaea as a frontlet and surmounted with the Parthenon as a crown.”

I find it impossible to conceive of a scholar facing that Rock, be it for the first or the hundredth time, without emotion; and Paul was a scholar. More, he was the Apostle of

* Now, all the lower part of this Agora lying under Areopagus and stretching in front of the Pnyx, is farm-land. To-day (Dec. 2) as I revise these pages, the ground just at my feet running well up to the Acropolis road is green with the young grain, while in the bottom toward the Pnyx a ploughman is turning over the old stubble.

a Faith which burst its provincial bounds and mastered the world only as it accepted and appropriated the perfect tongue of Greece. He could not have been unconscious, then, of all that looked down upon him as he stood face to face with this supreme and concentrate expression of Hellenic genius—a genius at its best, profoundly religious.

The Rock itself is a noble bit of nature, springing sheer and symmetrical some 350 feet above the Plain, with a levelled summit 1,000 feet in length from east to west and half as broad. Its fortress walls, beautiful in decay, must have been splendid in their perfection. Its sole portal, the Propylæa, was the boast of Athens and the envy of her rivals: in position, construction, decoration, it “stood like a splendid frontispiece of the Athenian citadel.” The flanking-wings, fairly well-preserved, and the broken columns of the five-fold gateway are still in place. The great Pentelic staircase of sixty steps that formed the steep approach is mostly gone, but the paved floor is well-nigh intact and the marble roadway through the splendid central door. It is the way of the Panathenaic pomp, and as our feet press it to-day we know that we are walking in the steps of every worthy of old Greece. Imposing as it is after the passing of three and twenty centuries, it requires an effort of the historical imagination to reconstruct the splendid fabric in its prime. “Let us imagine it restored to its pristine beauty, let it rise once more in the full dignity of its youthful stature, let all its architectural decorations be fresh and perfect, let their mouldings be again brilliant with their glowing tints of red and blue, let the coffers of its soffits be again spangled with stars and the white marble *antæ* be fringed over as they were once with their delicate embroidery of ivy-leaf, let it be on such a lovely day as the present day of November and then let the bronze valves of these five gates of the Propylæa be suddenly flung open and all the splendors of the interior of the Acropolis burst at once upon the view.” *

* Wordsworth, recalling the scene in the *Knights* of Aristophanes, where the rejuvenated Demos is presented to the audience. If anyone's taste be offended by the coloring of this picture, historically true as it is, a visit to the new Academy of Athens will reconcile and charm him. Pentelic marble in red and blue and gold is only less pleasing than the same marble steeped in the Athenian sunset hues of twenty centuries.

For with all its splendor the Propylæa is a portal only; the overture, as it has been called, to the Acropolis regarded as "one vast composition of architecture and sculpture." If it is long dwelt upon here it is because from Paul's point of view it alone of all the splendid features of the Rock stood out in full relief. From the Pnyx Aristophanes' sausage-seller could command all

"The citadel's brow
In the lofty old town of immortal renown,
With the noble Ionian violet crown,"—

no matter whether the gates swung open or shut; of the Parthenon, indeed, there are few better views than that from the Bema and the great platform above it. Not so from Areopagus: all the way up its slope the Propylæa veils even the great temples behind; only at the very summit the northern vestibule of the Erechtheum clears the citadel wall and the capitals and entablatures of the north line of the Parthenon appear. One temple on the sacred height and one only Paul had in full and striking view. It was the exquisite little Ionic temple of the Wingless Victory perched like a bird or springing like a flower upon the lofty bastion which commands the approach to the Propylæa. As it stood then it stands now, perfect in all but its delicate sculptures—a memorial forever of the airy grace that went hand in hand with the massive grandeur of Athenian art in its prime. Its position on the Acropolis reminds one of Athena's temple at Sunium in its relation to Attica: there it stands on the razor's edge of challenge proclaiming the city invincible. But, alas! even in Paul's time the Wingless Victory seemed to have taken wing: the power of Athens had waned, the religion of Athens was waning—what was the dainty temple but an empty boast? Yet Paul's insight may have discerned what the revolving centuries have now demonstrated to excess: the Wingless Victory was and is the fit expression of an Athenian ascendancy which shall never wane—the enduring empire of taste, of imagination, of Art. And was it not religion that had inspired it all? To Paul indeed it was a worn out religion, but no less was Judaism. He could no more despise

the one whose outcome he saw in the perfect bloom of human intelligence than the other expiring before his eyes in the birth-throes of a Redeeming Faith.

One other object on the upper Rock rose full in the Apostle's view and gave direction to his thought. It was the colossal bronze Athena Promachos rising fifty feet above her pedestal and towering over all—her gleaming spear and helmet-crest a glorious beacon to the mariner as he sailed around from Sunium and a terror to invaders as when she frightened Alaric from the sack of her citadel. Wrought by Pheidias from the spoils of Marathon, she stood the incarnation of Victory invincible: founder, defender, sovereign deity of the city which bore her name.

Though he could catch but a glimpse of the great temples, they must have been present with all their associations to the Apostle's thought: the lovely temple group of the Erechtheum with its wooden image of the city goddess, Athena Polias, so ancient it was famed as fallen from heaven,—with its sacred olive and its salt well, visible record of the Athena-Poseidon struggle for the dominion of Attica as of its issue in reconciling the two heavenly powers and making Athens mighty on sea and land; the majestic Parthenon, supreme expression of art in the service of religion, with its sculptured pediments and its grand Panathenaic frieze and enshrining above all the Virgin Athena as Pheidias had conceived and fashioned her in marble and gold and ivory.

But transcending all detail, there was the Altar-Rock itself, its sheer declivities honeycombed with shrines, its platform one great sanctuary, populous with gods, glorious with trophies, resplendent with such objects and associations as were never crowded into any other spot on earth.

And here, his eyes uplifted to this sacred hill, we might leave the man with the message of the Unknown God; for we are not to pass from the setting to the sermon. Enough if this study on the spot may serve, however imperfectly, to put the reader in Paul's place as he dwells upon Paul's words.

Yet one final reflection cannot be forborne. It has come to me again and again as I have meditated here until I have come to think of it as a part of Paul's own thought. The

Apostle's pulpit faced the prison-doors of Socrates: yonder across the Agora, hewn in the rock-face of the Muses' Hill, we still look upon the scene of the Divine Tragedy of Athens. Over all the centuries we still hear the voice of him who could not bargain with iniquity: whose reasonings on Immortality, perverse and tangled as they seem to us, are yet the noblest overture of Heathen Thought to the full harmony of Christian Revelation; and who sealed the sincerity of his life by gladly dying for the Truth as God gave him to see the Truth.

Paul indeed had a diviner message to deliver, yet before he came—even in the times of ignorance—"God had not left Himself without a witness" here.

"In the midst of Mars Hill," Athens, Nov. 30, 1890.